

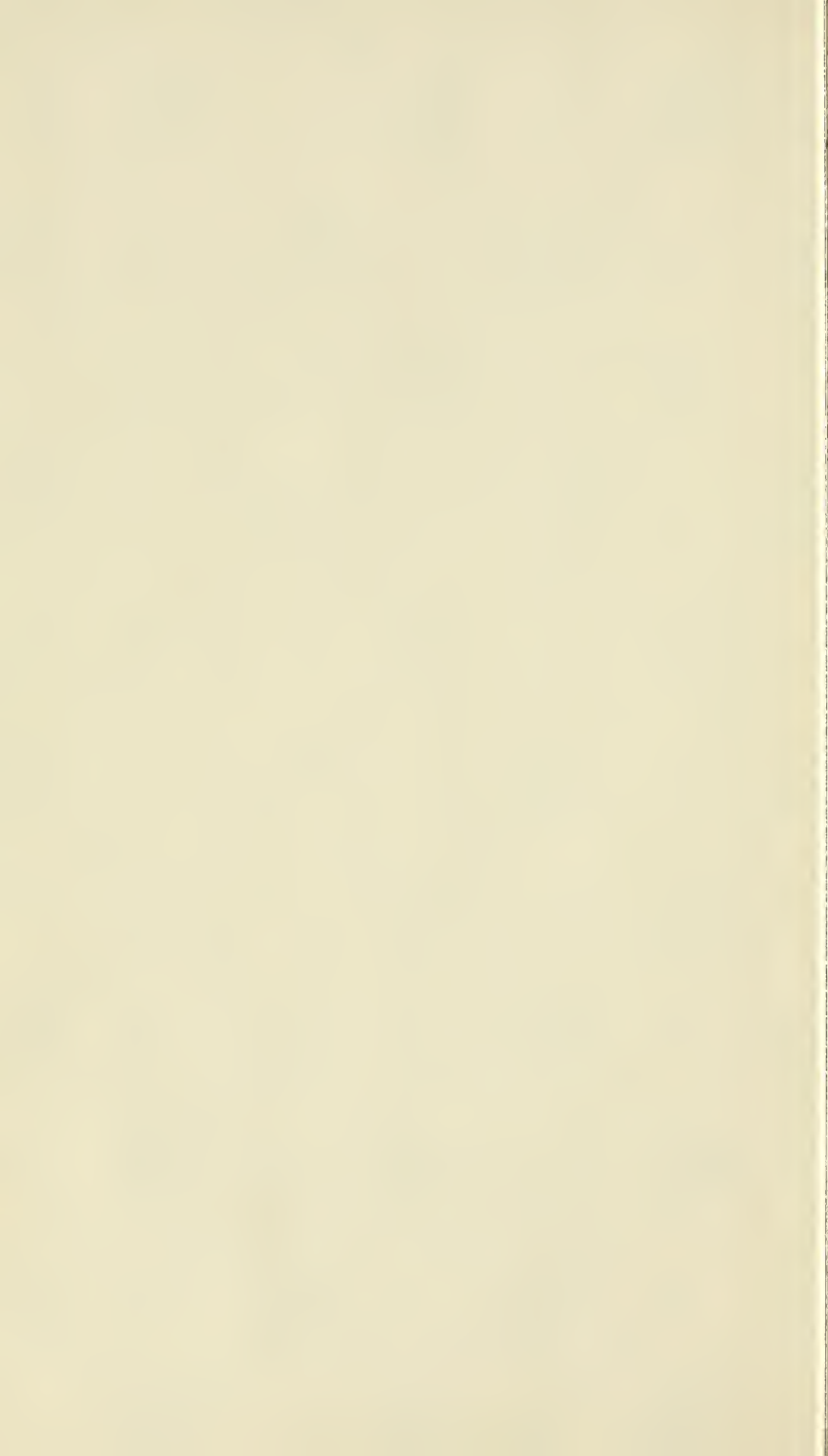
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LETTER

TO THE

HON. JESSE D. BRIGHT.

25-10

Gordon Tanner

Indianapolis, July 2, 1857.

HON. JESSE D. BRIGHT:

SIR:—By accident, I have met with a number of a newspaper dated Vevay, Indiana, June 24, 1857, containing a very coarse personal attack upon me. I do not know the editor of the paper, and I have reason to believe that he does not know me. I suspect that he belongs to a class of persons with whom I have never cultivated, and do not desire to form any acquaintance. That he is a petty liar and a hypocrite, the single number of his paper which I have seen, furnishes conclusive evidence. That he is a swash-buckler and a coward, from the little that I have heard of him, and from the fact that he did not send me a copy of the paper containing the attack, I believe. Speaking of what he terms "the honest party," of which he says I am a leader, he styles me "a poor devil of a fellow called Gordon Tanner, who tried to edit a paper last year, and went around among our prominent men begging money on the pretext of sustaining his silly bantling." Again, in noticing the fact that Gov. Wright accepts the mission to Prussia, but that Mr. E. W. H. Butler is continued for the present as Secretary of Legation, he says: "But Butler remains. Why this? Where is Gordon Tanner," &c., mentioning other names. "So long as Joe had battles to fight, these tools stood ready at his nod—nothing too mean for them do; no plan of disorganization so treacherous but they would undertake it," &c. Again; "Only think of it! John W. Davis, John G. Davis, Austin M. Puet, Gordon Tanner, &c., the leaders of an honest party! what a startling array of talents and purity! Mr. Buchanan and the Democratic party may as well

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surrender at once and beg for quarter! What an imposing bevy of honesty and ability! *We* cave, gentlemen, leave us our scalp, we pray you." Again: "The sooner they (meaning me and others,) leave the Democratic party, the purer will the party be. *Go*, for the success of the party, *go*."

In the same paper, I find an article purporting to be "taken from the *Hickory Withe*," but credited below to the *National Democrat*, which contains an inuendo intended for me, as I believe; but wholly false, whoever it may be aimed at; with regard to the Secretaryship of Legation, and some other matters.

Speaking of the *unanimous* resolutions of the Democracy of Marion County; of which I had the honor to be the author, the *State Sentinel* of May 13, says:

"The proceedings of the Marion county Democratic Convention of Saturday last have afforded a vast amount of joy and consolation to the *Journal*, &c. It is true that some *indiscreet and short-sighted men in the Democratic party here* used all the influence they possessed to keep up a feud between the friends of Wright and Bright; but the more prudent and conservative portion of the party, which is as fifty to one, have repudiated all attempts of *factionists*. *Some men* are in hot haste to act on extremes when, by short delay and forbearance, all that they could reasonably desire might, and probably will be accomplished in a regular and satisfactory manner."

That the free-soil editor of the *Sentinel* intended to cast suspicion upon the Democracy of my friends and myself by the above, is sufficiently evident. If it were not, the following, from the *Sentinel* of June 6, removes all doubt:

"What will become of that cry of lamentation over the bad faith kept with Gov. Wright, as raised by the sympathetic friends of the Governor, and as shadowed forth in the Marion county resolutions, &c. Had not these hot headed *disorganizers*, who uttered such loud complaints of Punic faith, waited for the moving of the waters before they 'pitched in,' they would have seen more clearly than they have done, and saved themselves from the reproach of being the authors of 'false clamor.'"

Such are the public charges that have been preferred against me and others. I might add some trivial inuendoes from other newspapers, and some provoking passages of private detraction and falsehood, circulated by persons in your interest; but I let these pass. If other men choose silently to submit to such aspersions they may; I will not. I shall take the shortest way to answer them all.

The ear-marks of these newspapers show, that instead of being devoted to the interests of the Democratic party, they are entirely devoted to your personal interests. Personally, or through your emissaries and agents, you dictate their course and control their action. You may deny this, and they may deny it, as some of them have,—the denial cannot change the fact. They have no praises but for you, and your inferior associates. They have nothing but gibes and sneers for the Democrat who does not bow down with them and worship you. Nothing savoring of manly inde-

pendence can appear in their column, without the imprimatur of some factotum of yours. Service of the party, and sacrifices for its success command no recognition from them, unless homage to your sublime inferiority is added as a crowning grace.

I know it is your habit to disclaim *any* responsibility for the conduct of your personal friends towards other members of the Democratic party; but when it is known that their traduction and persecution are but the reflection of your resentments, and that you and your favorites reap the results of all their plots and intrigues, you cannot avail yourself of that subterfuge. You must be held responsible. The subserviency of such creatures as the Vevay editor—their silly zeal for the advancement of your ridiculous ambition—their belief that they are serving you by belimbing others with their foulness—their awful reverence and admiration of your Platonic intellect, Magliabechian learning, and Demosthenic eloquence, as displayed in a senatorial career of thirteen years—the subdued obedience growing out of this feeling of awe—all conspire to fix your responsibility. They are but agents—you are the principal. They are but servants—slaves—you are their master. And the law is that *qui per alium facit per seipsum facere videtur*. The rule *respondeat superior* applies. It cannot be expected that *men* will contend on terms of equality with the swarm of emasculate sycophants who fawn upon you, ready to lick your hands for some menial office, or some miserable pittance of public plunder. You cannot skulk unseen behind a venal crew of scribbling parasites, and direct them where to spit their borrowed venom. No Sir! You must silence these petty calumniators, or the scourge shall be laid to your shoulders. You will be dragged out from behind the screen where all your plots are hatched, and the secrets of your laboratory exposed. The lash of ridicule, and the shafts of satire will soon strip you of all those factitious airs by which you have so long concealed your ignorance, and your avarice.

You will discover that even at a time like the present,

“When knaves and fools combined o’er all prevail,
When Justice halts, and Right begins to fail;
E’en then the boldest start from public sneers,
Afraid of shame, unknown to other fears;
More darkly sin, by satire kept in awe,
And shrink from ridicule, though not from law.”

You receive the benefits of their villenage, and you shall pay the penalty of their insults. It is that you may be trumpeted into power, that others are cried down. It is that you may continue to be the recipient of undeserved honors—the non-performing stipendiary of a disgraced constituency—a full-fed pensioner upon party bounty—that you have unleashed this yelping brood.

But let me answer their charges.

1. “A poor devil of a fellow called Gordon Tanner.”

This I suppose I must submit to. I am lean. I have not been able to increase my caul-fat and round up my stomach by luxurious living. I am poor. I have not been for twenty-five years an impotent and idle incumbent of public offices. I have no millionaire for patron and partner.—Above all: I have not learned that golden secret of magic art, by which a man, it seems, may become the proprietor of untold wealth, by unknown and indiscoverable means, in a very few years.

2. "Who tried to edit a paper last year."

Most people thought I succeeded. At all events, I trust you will allow that I am improving in the use of "that mighty instrument of little men," with which political bubbles are pricked, presidents made, and pretenders put to shame.

3. "And went around among our prominent men, begging money on the pretense of sustaining his silly bantling."

Aye! there's the point. For answer to this I refer you to the action of the last Democratic State Convention, ordering the publication of that same paper; to the action of its committee in choosing Wm. Culley and myself its editors; to the universal acknowledgement of its ability on the part of the local press of the State; and to the failure of the State Central Committee, under the imbecile management of its chairman, to provide for its support. I will add what I can easily prove, that I printed the paper for three or four weeks at my own expense, to keep it from going down before the October election, and that I lost more money upon it, than you, or either of the "prominent men" your minion speaks of, lost upon the entire canvass, counting the amounts you won upon the result.

4. "But Butler remains! Why this? Where is Gordon Tanner?"

To the exclamation I answer,—Yes! To the first question I answer,—because president Buchanan would have it so. To the second question I answer,—I am at home, where I intend to stay, discharging the duties of an office, (more honorable, and more profitable than Mr. Butler's,) which was generously conferred upon me by the people. I will answer further, that I have never applied for *any* appointment of any kind in my life, much less for that of Secretary of Legation at Berlin, which I would not have. Gov. Wright, to my certain knowledge, recommended Thomas B. Holcombe, Esq., late *Democratic* editor of the *Sentinel* for that position. That recommendation I most heartily approved, because I knew no man of higher qualifications for the post. I also know for myself and not from another, the president's reasons for retaining, for the time being, the present Secretary. If necessary I will give them. But for the present, it is enough to say that they are honorable to the president, and satisfactory to the minister.

5. The rest of this slang, I shall answer pretty much in a lump. First, I am charged with being Joe Wright's tool. Some of your friends say that I am his master. When you have instructed them all which to

call me, I will answer the charge to your satisfaction: for the present I dismiss it with the remark that I am neither. Secondly, your creature ridicules the idea that Hon. J. W. Davis, Hon. Jno. G. Davis, Gordon Tanner, &c., can have either honesty, talents, or influence—proposes that the party surrender to us, president and all, and with as much irony as a hired flunky can counterfeit, implores us to spare his scalp. These gentlemen can take care of themselves. As for me, if my neighbors think me honest, the howl of your whole pack at my heels would hardly change their opinion. If I have no ability, you may rejoice that it is so, for what I have will not be devoted to screening your inferiority, or ministering to your ambition. Purity, I have not the hypocrisy to claim; but you have neither the ingenuity to tempt, nor the wealth to buy me. As for talents, the gibe that I have none, comes with ill grace from “the trifling head and the contracted heart,” which can play second fiddle—nay, become mere intellectual menial and scavenger—to a man whose only distinguishing points of excellence are the muscles of an ox, and the principles of a weasel. From me, his scalp is in no danger. I do not wish to load myself with such fragrant trophies. His resemblance to that spotted little animal which, like the Parthian cavalry, does its enemy most scath as it flies, and is protected from harm by its littleness and its stink—will save that very tender part of his teguments from my knife.

But, thirdly, the most absurd undertaking of your devotees, is that darling one most flattering to your vanity, to-wit, their bootless attempt to read out of the Democratic ranks, all who refuse to recognize you as the idol of their party fealty, and the touchstone of their party faith. The star-eyed goddess of Democracy will be fallen low indeed, when you are installed as her high-priest. What have you done? What great principle have you announced? What great system of party policy have you enforced, that we are to accept you as the embodiment of Democracy? On the contrary, have you not flinched in every contest, and failed on every issue? Are we to be kicked out of the party because we do not applaud you for courage that you have never exercised, talents that you have never shown, and fair tactics that you have seldom practiced?

It is a little singular, too, that corruption cannot be denounced, but your friends resent it as an attack upon you. They style me a “disorganizer”—and why? Because I introduced the Marion county resolutions! Because I refused to bow in base submission to a half-successful *regime* of fraud and plunder, which serpent-like, has already insinuated its gilded folds into our ranks, and bound fast some of the strongest arms that once were free to strike for the honor of the Democratic party! But my alleged disorganization is not placed on that ground. They who make the charge have never had the hardihood directly to assail a single principle of the creed adopted by the Democracy of this county. They dare not do it! No. The treason lies in the fact that I have shown a disposition

which renders it improbable that I will be your tool, or a confederate of your satellites. This is the disorganization—the treason which offends your league of party vampires. You could oppose, in your feeble way, one Democratic administration from beginning to end: all right. You can coolly attempt to deceive and cajole another, with the same impunity. But if a Democrat, whose most withering political shame it has been to assist in placing you where you are, should refuse to worship his own bungling handiwork, he must be denounced as a traitor! Your vassals, at your bidding—for they do nothing without it—exalt you above presidents and cabinets; and you, giddy with the Pickwickian elevation, pleasantly assume to treat your Democratic constituents as the Brazilian planter treats his slaves. Of course the groundlings who swarm around you, (as moths flutter around a farthing candle,) for the sake of the crumbs of favor you have the graciousness occasionally to toss them, are not capable of shame; but *you* ought to be ashamed of such egregious presumption. You should not permit them to make you ridiculous by claiming for you a position for which Nature has not endowed you, and to which all your subtlety—and it is great—will never raise you.

But ridiculous as these pretensions seem to me, and plainly as the smart of injury prompts me to speak to you, I would not have you think that I underrate you. In the management of your selfish interests, the study and devotion of many years have given you a skill that few men ever acquire. You have learned to make position ancillary to wealth, and to use wealth in turn for the furtherance of ambition. You are skilled in the coarser arts of leadership, and know well how to rule the timid and the base, and to turn the malignant passions of the human breast against your foes. I will say more of you: you have in high perfection those abilities which, if coupled with the graces of mind, heart and education, would make you what you wish to be considered—namely, a great man. But to the despotic and destructive will of a Nero and the malicious cunning of a Machiavel, you link the feeble addition of the intellectual frivolity of a Caligula, and the gladiatorial tastes of a Commodus. I do you the justice to acknowledge that you have precedent for your presumption, and stimulating encouragement for your ambition. Agamemnon, though a “dog in forehead,” was “the king of men,” and Ajax, at once an ass in intellect and a behemoth in strength, was a hero on the fields of Troy. And if the destroyer of Priam’s race won everlasting fame, and the rival of Hector was immortalized in song, what glories must await the bloodless victor of unfought fields!—the renowned hero of a single speech!—the “illustrious conqueror of common sense!”

But I have done. “What is writ is writ.” I know the consequences.

“Cheer on the pack! the quarry stands at bay!”

I have followed the first public insult with the first public revenge. In the language of the Mingo chief, “I have fully glutted my vengeance.”

But every repetition of the injury shall be followed by a like revenge,

“Your men in buckram shall have blows enough,
And feel they too are ‘penetrable stuff’
And though I hope not hence unscathed to go,
Who conquers me shall find a stubborn foe.”

So long as You keep your scribbling spaniels in their kennels,

“So long shall last thine unmolested reign,
Nor any dare to take thy name in vain.”

But if you unleash upon me that

“Coward brood, which mangle as they prey,
By hellish instinct all that cross their way,
Aged or young, the living or the dead,”—

You may expect to hear from me again.

But to be serious, and to drop poetry, (I make no extra charge for it,) and take up the sober line of prose: you may choose peace or war henceforth. If your minions are silent, so mote it be: you shall have peace. If, as I expect, they are turned loose upon me, you shall have war. Even my enemies admit that, when I try, I can write the English language,—I am sorry, for the honor of Indiana, that your best friend cannot pay you the same compliment,—and if necessary, I will sum up upon you once a month. If my name is to be rolled under the tongue of calumny and slander, it shall be my fault if I do not make yours the watch-word of derision and contempt. If I am made the target of malice and hate, you shall pay a bitter penalty for a temporary triumph. It will be an easy thing for a man “envenomed by irrevocable wrong,” to make you the butt of ridicule—the laughing stock of a nation.

GORDON TANNER,

P. S. As you publish *private letters* addressed to you by your friends, I have concluded to print this before sending it, in order that I may see the proofs while I am living, as I have lately been taught that a certain kind of greatness is not ashamed to wrong the dead,





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